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Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the in-depth evaluation of political affairs: summary report

Summary

At its forty-fourth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination requested the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to undertake an in-depth evaluation of political affairs. The first report on subprogramme 1, on prevention, control and resolution of conflicts, was submitted to the Committee at its forty-sixth session. As part of phase two of the in-depth evaluation, individual evaluations of the remaining four political affairs subprogrammes and special political missions are being submitted to the Committee at its forty-seventh session. The present report assesses the entire Department of Political Affairs, which is responsible for implementing the political affairs programme, and provides a cross-cutting assessment of the Department as a whole. It does not summarize findings of the individual subprogramme and special political mission evaluation reports.

The Department of Political Affairs is fulfilling most of its core functions, and its many different clients are largely satisfied. Performance is more mixed, however, with regard to its functions supporting the prevention, control and resolution of conflicts. The Department faces several significant challenges regarding the performance of its substantive divisions and units, including insufficient knowledge management, operational guidelines and work processes. Given that increased resources are only needed at targeted levels, more efficient use of existing resources through greater staff mobility, task reallocation and resource planning would enhance performance. A complex operating environment and executive management issues,

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such as unclear roles and responsibilities and the need for strengthened coordination and communication, create further challenges to the full implementation of the Department's mandate. While steps have been taken to achieve a stronger Department-wide identity, a single unified vision that embodies a cohesive set of shared objectives and norms has been difficult to achieve. OIOS commends the Department for establishing a mediation support unit, engaging a senior adviser on mediation and launching the Peacemaker database.

OIOS makes nine recommendations to the Department:

- To conduct a strategic planning exercise in order to develop a Department-wide vision and mission statement
- To establish a framework for obtaining client feedback that is regular and systematic
- To develop a Department-wide knowledge-management strategy and system
- To develop a formal monitoring and evaluation system for the Department
- To develop a plan outlining options for greater staff mobility and more efficient task allocation in the Department
- To make an assessment to determine the needs and expectations that Department divisions and units have of the Department's executive management and to clarify roles
- To consider recasting the roles of senior leaders to clearly delegate management and administrative responsibilities
- To address current gender imbalance among senior Department staff
- To ensure that recommendations made in individual OIOS subprogramme and special political mission evaluations are followed up and implemented

Contents

		Paragraphs	*Page*
I.	Introduction	1–2	4
II.	Methodology	3	4
III.	Background	4–6	5
IV.	Evaluation findings	7–40	6
	A. With the exception of functions supporting the prevention, control and resolution of conflicts, where performance is mixed, the Department is fulfilling its core functions and its clients are largely satisfied	7–10	6
	B. The Department faces several significant challenges with regard to the performance of its substantive divisions and units	11–15	8
	C. While targeted resource increases are necessary, there is room for more efficient use of existing resources through enhanced staff mobility, task reallocation and resource planning	16–22	10
	D. The Department's complex operating environment poses further challenges to the full implementation of its mandate	23–29	12
	E. Increased clarity of executive management roles and functions, as well as strengthened communication and coordination with substantive Department divisions and units, would also enhance the Department's performance	30–35	14
	F. A single unified Department vision has been difficult to achieve	36–40	17
V.	Conclusion	41	19
VI.	Completion of the political affairs evaluation	42	19
VII.	Recommendations	43–53	19

of all Department non-executive management staff;[5] a self-administered survey of all Department executive management staff;[6] and 16 interviews with executive management staff. The methodology is limited by the low response rates for the two surveys on executive management. OIOS also acknowledges that a comprehensive review of political affairs should include a full assessment of the Department's relationship with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and advice to the Secretary-General on political aspects of United Nations relations with Member States. *The review should also mention the Policy Committee and the Executive Committee on Peace and Security processes*. A full assessment of the system is, however, beyond the scope of the present report.

III. Background

4. The political affairs programme is divided into five subprogrammes which are implemented by eight divisions or units with the support of executive management. The subprogrammes are the following:

- Subprogramme 1, on prevention, control and resolution of conflict, implemented by four regional divisions (Africa I, Africa II, Americas and Europe, Asia and the Pacific)
- Subprogramme 2, on electoral assistance, implemented by the Electoral Assistance Division
- Subprogramme 3, on Security Council affairs, implemented by the Security Council Affairs Division
- Subprogramme 4, on decolonization, implemented by the Decolonization Unit
- Subprogramme 5, on the question of Palestine, implemented by the Division for Palestinian Rights

5. The Department provides executive direction for the political and substantive activities of special political missions and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, which are funded under sections 3B and 3C of the programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007 (A/60/6 (Sect. 3)). The executive management and executive support components, together with the five subprogrammes, account for only about 13 per cent ($55.8 million) of the total proposed political affairs programme budget of $425 million for the biennium 2006-2007.[7]

6. The Department currently has 221 staff, including 133 Professional staff and 88 General Service staff.[8] It is headed by an Under-Secretary-General, supported by an Office of the Under-Secretary-General, reporting directly to the Secretary-General. Two Assistant Secretaries-General in the Department report to the Under-Secretary-General: one responsible for the Africa Regional Divisions and the

[5] The survey was conducted from December 2006 to January 2007. A total of 37 of 177 division or unit staff responded, for a 21 per cent response rate.

[6] The survey was conducted from December 2006 to January 2007. A total of 12 of 46 executive management staff responded, for a 26 per cent response rate.

[7] The bulk of programme resources are concentrated in the special political missions and the Office of the Special Coordinator, totalling $369 million.

[8] Does not include staff in special political missions and the Office of the Special Coordinator.

Security Council Affairs Division, the other responsible for the Americas and Europe and Asia and the Pacific regional divisions, the Decolonization Unit and the Division for Palestinian Rights. The executive management of the Department also includes the Executive Office, the Policy Planning Unit, the Unit for Cooperation with Regional Organizations, the Executive Committee on Peace and Security and the office for the United Nations Dialogue with the Global South.

IV. Evaluation findings

A. With the exception of functions supporting the prevention, control and resolution of conflicts, where performance is mixed, the Department is fulfilling its core functions and its clients are largely satisfied

Core functions of the Department of Political Affairs

7. The core functions of the Department of Political Affairs encompass various tasks and activities undertaken by the divisions and units implementing the five political affairs subprogrammes and the special political missions. They range from the conduct of political analyses and briefing materials for the Secretary-General to assistance to Member States in electoral matters and the provision of secretariat services and substantive support to intergovernmental bodies. They also include the publication of various documents, such as the *Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council*, the annual report of the Security Council and the 16 working papers on the Non-Self-Governing Territories, as well as the planning and execution of intergovernmental meetings and seminars, liaison with civil society and the maintenance of various databases. OIOS acknowledges that some subprogrammes have a more limited and defined scope of activity; the regional divisions have the broadest mandate and are the only divisions delivering the core functions related to the prevention, control and resolution of conflict. Based on the findings of the individual subprogramme evaluations, OIOS concludes that most of the divisions and units, as well as envoys and sanctions committee expert groups, are successfully carrying out their core functions. The exceptions are the regional divisions, which account for almost half of the combined resources of the five subprogrammes (45.9%), but less than half of all Department staff (see A/60/6 (Sect. 3)). They face significant challenges in fully implementing their mandates regarding peacemaking and peacebuilding. OIOS acknowledges that this is partially due to an increase in mandates without a concomitant increase in resources.

Client satisfaction

8. The Department services a broad range of clients (see table 1). While client needs and expectations may vary, surveys and interviews indicate that the clients give high overall ratings to the services and output the Department provides. Similarly, United Nations and non-United Nations partners give generally good ratings to the Department's work.

Table 1
Department subprogrammes and clients

Subprogramme: implementing division/unit	*Clients*
Subprogramme 1: regional divisions	Secretary-General, Member States, General Assembly, regional organizations
Subprogramme 2: Electoral Assistance Division	Member States, United Nations and non-United Nations partner organizations
Subprogramme 3: Security Council Affairs Division	Security Council and subsidiary organs, Secretary-General
Subprogramme 4: Decolonization Unit	Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples
Subprogramme 5: Division for Palestinian Rights	Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People
Special political missions	Sanctions committees, Member States, Secretary-General

9. Indicators of successful Department performance include the relevance, quality and timeliness of its work. The indicators are largely rated positively by the Department's clients and partners. For example, electoral authorities, United Nations partners and non-governmental organizations describe the expert electoral support of the Electoral Assistance Division as essential, particularly in post-conflict countries where electoral authorities may not be able to organize elections by themselves. Moreover, interviews and surveys of Security Council members reveal that the contribution of the Security Council Affairs Division in providing timely advice on rules of procedure, precedent and protocol is critical to the effective functioning of the Council. Most Special Committee members report that the substantive advice of the Decolonization Unit is of high quality, and the members of the Palestinian Rights Committee report that their Committee has been able to fully carry out its mandated work programme with the effective support of the Division for Palestinian Rights. With regard to the regional divisions, however, while there is unanimous, deep appreciation for the hard work and dedication of regional division staff, the quality of their work is described as "mixed", ranging from very good to very poor, and OIOS observed persisting weaknesses in their information and analytical products. The evaluation of the regional divisions found that a significant effort is required to support the Executive Office of the Secretary-General with regard to the political aspects of United Nations relations with Member States, often taking the form of note-taking and the preparation of talking points. This "foreign ministry" support was found to distract the divisions from their focus on conflict-related work. OIOS observed a need for greater clarity in the delineation of conflict-

related work and Secretary-General support, and the need for a solution that could involve different sections focusing on both activities.

10. Additional indicators of successful performance by the Department are the responsiveness and expertise of its staff. Given the political environment in which the Department functions, its staff must often respond to time-sensitive and complex demands, thus necessitating relevant skills and competencies to meet them. Subprogramme evaluations for the Electoral Assistance Division, the Security Council Affairs Division, the Decolonization Unit and the Division for Palestinian Rights highlight overall satisfaction with staff responsiveness and expertise, and the technical expertise and knowledge of their staff are considered to be primary resources of the Department, by both its clients and its partners. In the case of the regional divisions, the assessed rating of staff knowledge and expertise was mixed, similar to the assessment of the quality of the divisions' work.

B. The Department faces several significant challenges with regard to the performance of its substantive divisions and units

Knowledge management

11. OIOS notes that knowledge is one of the Department's primary resources and crucial to the effective implementation of its mandate (see para. 10 above). It encompasses technical expertise on substantive issues, political acumen, institutional memory on precedent, protocol and procedure, and a wealth of personal experience. OIOS observes, however, that in most divisions and units, there is a lack of adequate mechanisms and tools for capturing, storing, sharing and disseminating knowledge. In addition, no systems exist to fully integrate the knowledge into the daily work activities of staff members, nor is much of the knowledge documented. For example, the system currently used by the Electoral Assistance Division to capture, store and share the Division's experience in electoral matters in various political contexts and countries is inadequate. In the Security Council Affairs Division, information-management systems for storing and retrieving data on lessons learned, precedent and procedure and other substantive issues are not sufficient. The Decolonization Unit also lacks any knowledge-management system, and the best practices and lessons learned of special political missions are similarly not captured. OIOS observes that, in some divisions and units, knowledge is concentrated in a few individuals, with significant risk of losing that knowledge when those individuals leave or transfer.

12. OIOS observes that information-sharing and dissemination of knowledge across divisions and units, or between special political missions, is limited. For example, the regional divisions do not consistently share their knowledge of good practices and lessons learned with others, and staff in the Division for Palestinian Rights also lack mechanisms for the systematic sharing of information on the question of Palestine with their colleagues in the Department. Staff interviews and surveys also show that information is not consistently shared between executive management offices and the divisions or units that they support. To address those concerns, a dedicated Department-wide knowledge-management section could be considered.

Operational guidelines

13. OIOS furthermore notes that most divisions and units either lack or have insufficient operational guidelines for day-to-day activities and tasks; consequently, Department staff often rely on their own individual methods for performing their work. For example, the Decolonization Unit lacks guidelines documenting its internal work processes. In the Security Council Affairs Division, guidelines exist for some but not all key products and processes. OIOS notes that such guidelines are needed to ensure consistency and credibility in the Department's work. Well-developed, clear guidelines also facilitate greater timeliness and quality of the Department's services and output. Regional division staff employ inconsistent methods to collect and analyse quality political information, and Electoral Assistance Division staff rely on individual judgement rather than written guidelines and criteria when reviewing requests for electoral assistance.[9] *The Department of Political Affairs states that it has developed tools and guidelines to conduct political analysis, however desk officers do not receive sufficient training in the tools. While the proposed handbook for political affairs officers will supplement resources in that regard, officers must still be provided with adequate mentoring and support as political analysis is a cumulatively acquired skill. The Department also points out that it is preparing the handbook, to be available online, with existing human resources.*

Work processes

14. Given the highly variable yet time-critical demands for many Department services, well-developed and effective work processes are essential to enhance the Department's efficiency. In its individual subprogramme evaluations, OIOS notes that enhanced work processes are needed to improve the efficiency of the Department's work, including better guidelines and communication systems, strengthened coordination mechanisms and streamlined work operations.

Monitoring and evaluation

15. OIOS also notes that the Department and its individual divisions and units lack a robust monitoring and evaluation system for assessing their work. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation would institutionalize a more reflective process by which the Department can monitor its own performance, with a view to learning and refining work processes and structures to better meet performance indicators, while also strengthening staff and management accountability for their performance and results. A built-in monitoring and evaluation function would also help the Department to track its mandate compliance in a more formal, systematic and transparent manner.

[9] OIOS acknowledges that the Department of Political Affairs often lacks first-hand information owing to insufficient resources to make field visits and therefore relies on the triangulation of secondary data resources.

C. While targeted resource increases are necessary, there is room for more efficient use of existing resources through enhanced staff mobility, task reallocation and resource planning

Targeted resource increases

16. OIOS recognizes that isolated resource constraints are an obstacle to the effectiveness of several of the Department's divisions and units. In the Security Council Affairs Division, OIOS notes that the growth in sanctions committees has not been met with a corresponding resource increase in the Division branch supporting those committees. Special political missions have increased exponentially over a 10-year period without a concomitant increase in resources for backstopping and oversight by Headquarters. One constraint identified by OIOS as hampering the work quality of regional divisions is the lack of staff and resource allocations commensurate with expanding mandates and demand; desk officers cannot adequately follow developing events around the world because they lack adequate time for monitoring, research and analytical work. On average, regional divisions are able to focus on fewer than half of the countries in conflict, or potentially in conflict that should be receiving coverage, and they provide only limited substantive support and attention to some of the special political missions. Although there are certain management and technological initiatives that can be taken using current resources to address some of the problematic areas of work, there is a limit to what such initiatives could achieve. OIOS believes that greater resources would be necessary to more effectively meet the broad mandates of regional divisions.

17. The travel budget of the Department of Political Affairs is limited; for the biennium 2006-2007, it is $1,369,200. That sum includes travel for 57 desk officers in regional divisions, the other political affairs officers in the remaining divisions or units, the Assistant Secretaries-General and the Under-Secretary-General. Urgent travel needs are therefore given priority over more routine, but equally important, staff travel, given that field travel is essential to the political work conducted by much of the Department, especially with regard to developing and implementing conflict-prevention strategies. For example, a Department senior staff member estimates that, on average, desk officers travel to their assigned countries once every four years.

18. A lack of resources also affects the Department's executive management. At the 2005 World Summit, Member States requested the creation of a mediation support office in the Department using existing resources. Following the recent restructuring of the Policy Planning Unit, the mediation support mandate has been added to that office's functions, posing additional constraints to already scarce resources. OIOS notes that Unit officers have too many portfolios to handle their work efficiently, and that the Unit's work has therefore focused mostly on the mediation support mandate. To address the problem, the Department recently obtained approval for three additional posts for the policy planning mandate, and plans to request more posts for the mediation support team. Interviews with Department staff reveal that existing Executive Office resources are also insufficient. Currently, the Executive Office has 3 Professional posts (one P-5, one P-4 and one P-2) and 12 General Service posts. OIOS observes a clear lack of

balance in the General Service to Professional staff ratio for the office.[10] Executive Office Professional staff describe morale in their office as low, owing to the high volume of work. Some staff also report that tasks are not fairly allocated and that some General Service staff members must perform duties at the Professional level.

Staff mobility and task reallocation

19. Staff resources could be better integrated by developing formal structures and mechanisms for the rotation of staff on an ad hoc temporary and/or cyclical basis to other parts of the Department, as well as by reallocating tasks among divisions and units to make more efficient use of staff time. More formal exchanges would help Department staff capitalize on their complementarities and strengthen their professional opportunities, creating enhanced professional connections and more widespread information-sharing networks. A higher level of staff mobility across divisions would also foster a unified vision for the Department. For example, in recognition of the fact that the workload of the Decolonization Unit is more concentrated in the first half of the year, informal arrangements have been developed whereby the Unit and certain regional divisions help each other in their work assignments. The results of this work arrangement have been positive, enhancing the integration of the Unit within the Department, optimizing staff resources and facilitating the exchange of information, knowledge and expertise among Department staff, without any adverse effect on the Unit's capacity to meet its core functions to support the Special Committee. OIOS also acknowledges that staff mobility between Headquarters and the field, although difficult to achieve without a strong field presence, and between the Department of Political Affairs and other departments, including the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, would also be beneficial. OIOS notes that attention paid to career development also enhances staff performance.

Resource planning

20. OIOS furthermore notes that strategic planning on how to use newly acquired assets is also crucial for the Department's efficient use of resources. For example, while a Turner Foundation grant assigned $1.9 million to the United Nations Dialogue with the Global South project that has benefited the Department, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, interviews with executive management staff indicate that no planning has been done to date on how the newly acquired resources, knowledge and contacts will be used by the Department. Better resource planning could also be achieved in some cases through faster filling of permanent vacancies, more efficient allocation of tasks within divisions and units, and the delegation of some activities, both from more senior- to junior-level Professional staff within divisions or units and from executive management to divisions and units. For example, two executive management staff members suggest that talking points and the approval of cables are directly signed off by division directors rather than by executive management staff.

21. OIOS notes that the Department has made considerable efforts in the area of advocacy to increase its financial resources. Member States have been responsive to these requests, and the Department has recently raised $2 million for mediation

[10] This is above the average Secretariat ratio of 1.36 General Service posts to 1 Professional post proposed for the biennium 2006-2007 (A/60/6 (Introduction), para. 22).

support through voluntary contributions and $650,000 since 2000 for its Trust Fund for Updating the *Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council*. While some executive management staff members believe that more could and should be done in this area, others believe that financial support for the Department should not be based on voluntary contributions, but on a regular and sustainable budget, since voluntary contributions only provide a temporary solution.

22. While the Department has made efforts to improve transparency in the use of its 10 trust funds, administration of the funds is not fully efficient or flexible.[11] The Department has appointed a focal point for donor relations and coordination of trust funds, who has played an important role in the establishment of guidelines to evaluate trust fund projects. However, OIOS notes that the focal point works only with the two largest trust funds and on a part-time and temporary basis. Also, the partnership between the Executive Office, which has administrative responsibility for trust funds, and the focal point has not been adequately clarified. The administrative process following project submission is lengthy.

D. The Department's complex operating environment poses further challenges to the full implementation of its mandate

Mandate relevance

23. The mandate of the Department of Political Affairs encompasses a broad range of objectives directly corresponding to the focus areas of its five subprogrammes and special political missions. For some divisions and units, mandate relevance emanates directly from the General Assembly, as is the case with the Decolonization Unit and the Division for Palestinian Rights, since each supports a committee whose existence and work programme are renewed annually by a General Assembly resolution. Similarly, envoys are appointed when the Secretary-General deems conditions conducive to bringing his good offices to bear on preventive diplomacy and peacemaking, or when the Security Council establishes a sanctions regime that requires an expert group to monitor and report on sanction violations. For other subprogrammes, mandate relevance is underpinned by ongoing, and often growing, demand for assistance generated by global political, economic and social developments. Thus, the increasing number of intra-State conflicts has created the need for continued preventive and peacebuilding expertise on the part of the regional divisions, while a steady upward trend in Member State requests for electoral assistance has warranted continued assistance by the Electoral Assistance Division. As regards the Security Council Affairs Division, a steady expansion in the activities of the Security Council and subsidiary organs has led to ever-greater demand for its support. OIOS also notes that, in both surveys and interviews,

[11] The trust funds are: (a) the Trust Fund in Support of Special Missions and Other Activities related to Preventive Diplomacy and Peacemaking; (b) the United Nations Trust Fund for Electoral Observation; (c) the Trust Fund for Negotiations to Find a Comprehensive Settlement of the Georgian/Abkhaz Conflict; (d) the Trust Fund in Support of the Activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau; (e) the Trust Fund for Updating the *Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council*; (f) the Trust Fund for Peacebuilding in Somalia; (g) the Trust Fund in Support of the Activities of the Secretary-General's Special Representative to the Great Lakes Region of Central Africa; (h) the Trust Fund for Preventive Action; (i) the Trust Fund to support the Distinct Entity Created to Provide Security for the United Nations Presence in Iraq; and (j) the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships.

Division staff, clients and partners all attest to the relevance of the mandates of Department subprogrammes and special political missions.

24. Department subprogramme mandates range from the relatively specific to the broad. Some subprogrammes, such as decolonization and the question of Palestine, are more focused on specific tasks and outputs; other subprogramme mandates are broad, to give implementing divisions and units the flexibility to adjust to changes in their work environment. The very same mandate breadth, however, sometimes makes implementation challenging, owing to a lack of clear and precise parameters to guide the divisions and units in their programme of work.

Political intricacies

25. The Department faces a range of complexities in its operating environment that pose challenges to its ability to fully implement its mandate. In keeping with the Department's explicit focus on political affairs, all its subprogrammes navigate a range of political intricacies. In their efforts to prevent and resolve conflict, special political missions operate in a highly charged environment requiring diplomatic tact in communicating with a range of parties. The Decolonization Unit and the Division for Palestinian Rights deal with political issues marked by strong, and frequently divergent, views in the international community and among Member States. Everyday, the Security Council Affairs Division must facilitate the deliberations and decision-making of the Security Council and its subsidiary organs, even though Council members may disagree on the means by which to maintain peace and security. The Electoral Assistance Division must gain the trust and cooperation of the various opposing factions if its electoral assistance efforts are to be successful, while the regional divisions must take into account the full range of political sensitivities in conducting their analyses and sharing their reports.

26. In order to effectively negotiate these political intricacies, staff must remain updated, on a continuous basis and in an ever-changing environment, on prevailing analytical frameworks, issues, history and political developments governing their work. For some subprogrammes, substantive expertise is explicitly stated in the mandate itself. While the Department has largely managed the demands of working in a politically complex environment, in some cases there is a need for greater professional development in core aspects of its work. For instance, interviews with staff in the regional divisions, a primary source of in-depth regional political analyses in the Secretariat, reveal a need for strengthening analytical frameworks and methods in order to make those analyses more useful.

Topical overlaps

27. Three additional layers of complexity have posed equal challenges to the full implementation of the Department's mandate. One concerns the topical overlaps that exist between the Department itself and other United Nations entities, such as between the regional divisions and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, where there are complex overlaps between the different phases of peace operations, and between the Electoral Assistance Division and the United Nations Development Programme, where each has a role in the provision of electoral assistance.[12] Such

[12] OIOS notes that such overlap challenges stem from the fact that many global issues of which the United Nations is seized are inherently multifaceted.

overlaps require a clear and efficient division of labour, with precisely defined roles and responsibilities. The regional division evaluation notes that, while they have made good efforts to strengthen partner relationships, most of these relationships remain fragile and are not institutionalized, thereby posing risks to their long-term durability. In particular, the relationship between the regional divisions with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations was noted as problematic, albeit improving.

Divergent client expectations

28. The second layer of complexity is the divergent expectations of some division or unit clients. This is less relevant for the Electoral Assistance Division, whose client expectations are more coherent and consistent, but more relevant for the regional divisions, the Security Council Affairs Division, the Decolonization Unit, the Division for Palestinian Rights and some special political missions. While their primary client is a single United Nations body, individual clients within that body often have different and even conflicting support needs and expectations, which sometimes differ fundamentally. Some clients urge the Department of Political Affairs to be more innovative, proactive or substantive in its mandate implementation, while others prefer a more conservative role for the Department. In these divisions and units, there is a need to better understand clients' and partners' expectations, particularly given that the Department lacks a regular feedback mechanism by which to assess and address client needs. OIOS notes that the need to clearly understand client needs and expectations is particularly acute in the Department, given the intensely political nature of its work.

Time-sensitive environment

29. The third layer of complexity is created by the highly time-sensitive environment in which the Department must sustain its effectiveness. For example, the regional divisions must conduct accurate and reliable political analyses often at very short notice, and the Security Council Affairs Division must be constantly prepared to meet the frequently changing needs of the Security Council.

E. Increased clarity of executive management roles and functions, as well as strengthened communication and coordination with substantive Department divisions and units, would also enhance the Department's performance

Executive management assessment

30. As stated in the programme of work for 2006-2007, the objective of Department executive management is to ensure full implementation of legislative mandates and compliance with United Nations policies and procedures with respect to the management of the programme of work and of staff and financial resources. Department staff interviews and survey data indicate an overall positive assessment of the work conducted by the Department management.[13] Staff morale in the Department has improved somewhat, largely owing to changes adopted by the most

[13] OIOS notes that this evaluation was conducted during the tenure of the former Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

recent senior leadership, which was generally considered to be inclusive and to communicate effectively with staff. OIOS notes that these positive changes will need to be continued for staff morale to be improved further. The quality of work of the main executive management offices is generally assessed well by Department staff with an opinion (see table 2). However, the fact that many staff members do not have an opinion on the offices of the Assistant Secretaries-General may indicate less familiarity with what those offices do and their relevance to staff's own work.[14]

Table 2
Department division/unit staff assessments of executive management offices

	Staff rating			
Office	*Excellent/ good*	*Fair*	*Poor/ very poor*	*No opinion*
Office of the Under-Secretary-General	73%	19%	3%	5%
Office of the Assistant Secretary-General with responsibilities for Africa I and Africa II Divisions and the Security Council Affairs Division	42%	14%	3%	41%
Office of the Assistant Secretary-General with responsibilities for the Americas and Europe Division, the Asia and the Pacific Division, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Decolonization Unit	54%	16%	3%	27%
Policy Planning Unit	33%	22%	3%	42%

Executive management roles and responsibilities

31. Despite an overall positive assessment, however, OIOS notes ways in which the work of executive management can be improved. First of all, OIOS notes a serious vulnerability with regard to the lack of a central management team or function; current management responsibilities are spread throughout the Department. There is also a lack of clarity on how work is distributed among different executive management offices; staff indicate that the current division of labour is largely conducted on an ad hoc basis. For example, even though the Policy Planning Unit is responsible for the Department's cross-cutting issues, both the Office of the Under-Secretary-General and the offices of the Assistant Secretaries-General have also been made responsible for a number of those issues. In addition, several executive management staff members acknowledge the existence of some duplication between the Office of the Under-Secretary-General and the offices of the Assistant Secretaries-General, such as the provision of advice to the Secretary-General. This duplication has occasionally resulted in lack of coordination, such as when the Under-Secretary-General has contacted a division director on a sensitive issue without first going through the Assistant Secretary-General. While OIOS acknowledges that some duplication is inevitable and even necessary to ensure the quality of information reaching both the Secretary-General and the Under-Secretary-General, it can lead to inefficiency. For example, some Department staff express frustration over excessive review layers between desk officers and the Under-

[14] OIOS acknowledges that staff not directly reporting to the office of an Assistant Secretary-General are less likely to be familiar with its work.

Secretary-General, which in their view creates unnecessary delays in urgent matters requiring political analysis or advice.

32. The lack of clarity also affects senior official roles. OIOS notes a need to clarify the role of the Assistant Secretaries-General to better support the work of the divisions and units, since it has often been left to the individuals occupying those posts to interpret what their role entailed.[15] Currently, the offices of the two Assistant Secretaries-General play somewhat different roles, one taking on more thematic cross-cutting and management issues than the other. With regard to the Under-Secretary-General's role, OIOS notes that his or her responsibilities leave little time to devote to daily management. Some executive management staff members suggest that one of the two Assistant Secretaries-General be assigned exclusive administrative and personnel management responsibilities for the Department. *The Department believes that the role of the Assistant Secretaries-General should be enhanced and clearly defined in support of the Under-Secretary-General's dual role of chief administrator and the political head of the Department and that regular meetings between the Under-Secretary-General and the Assistant Secretaries-General on management and political issues should be institutionalized.*

Coordination and communication

33. OIOS notes that efforts have been made to increase coordination among executive management and the divisions and units. Several executive management staff members favourably note the approach adopted by the former Under-Secretary-General in becoming more directly involved in the work of the divisions and units. Daily meetings between the Under-Secretary-General, the Assistant Secretaries-General, the Executive Office, the Policy Planning Unit and division and unit directors to coordinate and exchange information are also considered very useful. Attempts are also being made to enhance coordination between the Policy Planning Unit and the rest of the Department. They include daily meetings with the division and unit directors, "brown bag" events, and the establishment of focal points in all divisions and units for the different issues for which the Unit is responsible. OIOS supports continued efforts such as those to enhance coordination in the Department. Department staff interviews and surveys also indicate that stronger coordination and communication between the Office of the Under-Secretary-General and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General is required.

34. With regard to the Executive Office, there are divergent expectations among Department staff members regarding the role it should play. For example, the respective administrative support roles played by the Executive Office and the Security Council Affairs Division with regard to expert groups have yet to be sufficiently defined. In order to alleviate its high workload, the Executive Office has appointed administration and finance focal points in all Department divisions and units to which particular administrative and financial responsibilities are delegated. Although OIOS notes some resistance to the delegation of work, the new system contributes to the integration and coordination of the Department's work and incorporates a substantive perspective to administrative issues and decisions. OIOS believes that the involvement of substantive divisions and units in budget

[15] One executive management staff member explained that the role of the Assistant Secretary-General was often dependent upon his or her personal relationship with the Under-Secretary-General.

formulation, preparation of the strategic framework and other administrative matters is beneficial to overall performance, as long as it does not detract from their substantive work.

Senior staff gender ratios

35. Finally, OIOS notes that there are currently fewer female director-level staff members than there were in December 2005.[16] Increased efforts are needed to ensure gender balance in the Department, particularly at the senior level.

F. A single unified Department vision has been difficult to achieve

Obstacles

36. The Department faces a number of obstacles to achieving a unified vision that embodies a cohesive set of shared objectives and norms. The chief obstacle is the lack of an overarching departmental mission that unifies the individual subprogrammes and the special political missions. OIOS sees the Department's mission as one of providing independent, timely and credible political analysis, expertise and substantive support to its various clients throughout the Organization. OIOS notes that a universal sense of shared purpose among the Department's divisions and units is somewhat lacking. Half of staff survey respondents (53%) agree that executive management has been effective in providing a clearly articulated vision and strategy for the Department, but one third (31%) disagree.[17] In interviews, some staff members say that they are not sure how their division or unit fits into the larger Department, or report feeling isolated from their colleagues in the Department.

37. Interviews and surveys of staff members also reveal some concern about the lack of a common thread uniting the Department. Thus, whereas a majority of respondents to the staff survey (70%) see a clear link between their own work and the Department's objectives and mandate, a sizeable minority (30%) do not. The manifold complexities that the Department confronts on a daily basis further contribute to difficulties in uniting the Department under a common identity. Some staff members have to focus their attention on meeting their own subprogramme mandates rather than on wider and broader departmental issues and priorities.

38. The difficulty in achieving a shared departmental vision has concrete implications for the implementation of the Department's workplan. Although staff members tend to describe the quality of their professional relationships with colleagues in other divisions or units in generally positive terms, data gleaned from staff interviews and surveys indicate relatively infrequent interaction between them. This isolation is particularly detrimental to mandate implementation in cases where heightened interaction might enhance Department-wide efficiency, for example, by reducing duplication and helping subprogrammes to exploit complementarities that exist between and among them (see para. 19 above). For example, political analyses by regional divisions could benefit colleagues in other divisions and units, and the

[16] In December 2005, there were three women at the D-2 level and four women at the D-1 level. Since then, two have left and been replaced by men and three are currently being replaced through the Galaxy system.

[17] The remaining 16 per cent of respondents neither agree nor disagree.

institutional memory of the Security Council Affairs Division of precedent and procedure in the Security Council could be more widely harnessed to inform colleagues' work. Furthermore, the Division for Palestinian Rights is a source of information and knowledge on the question of Palestine, but its expertise is not typically integrated into the work of the regional division dealing with the same geographical region. While the Department's divisions and units have embarked on individual initiatives to strengthen their interconnectivity, existing linkages are often not institutionalized.

39. The lack of a single unified vision extends to the subprogramme level as well.[18] For some division or unit staff members, this translates into disparate interpretations of the role of their division or unit, or a difference of perspective on how proactive or innovative they should be in defining their workplan or interacting with clients. OIOS acknowledges that executive management exercises more limited control over the development of a shared vision at the division or unit level, since these areas fall more directly under the purview of division or unit managers themselves. However, OIOS notes some areas in which executive management might enhance these efforts, including more explicit and consistent support for division or unit management's vision-building. Department staff do not consistently agree that executive management has been effective in providing a clearly articulated vision and strategy for their individual subprogramme. Among staff members surveyed, only 28 per cent of respondents agree with this sentiment, while 39 per cent disagree.[19]

Recent steps

40. OIOS notes that executive management has recently attempted to foster a shared vision, but more can be accomplished. In 2006, six town hall meetings were held with all staff, at which an attempt was made to clearly articulate a vision and strategy for the Department. Also, in January 2006, a 2-day retreat attended by staff of all divisions and units was held to revitalize the Department and realign its priorities. A vision with four focus areas was developed, and communicated to staff members through newsletters, e-mails and a brochure.[20] OIOS commends those efforts. However, there is a need for more proactive executive management in facilitating integration among the divisions and units and in articulating and fostering a shared departmental vision. In interviews, Department staff members report a recent movement towards greater interaction among the divisions and units. The institutionalization of daily meetings of all directors and chiefs represents one such initiative. Some divisions and units, moreover, have welcomed the former Under-Secretary-General's commitment to help them convey the usefulness of the work of their individual division or unit to colleagues throughout the Department. OIOS notes, however, that executive management's involvement in those initiatives has largely been at the behest of the divisions and units themselves.

[18] OIOS acknowledges that divisions and units have disparate roles and mandates which make the creation of a single vision challenging.

[19] The remaining 33 per cent of respondents neither agree nor disagree.

[20] The focus areas are political analysis; peacemaking and preventive diplomacy; electoral assistance; and servicing of the Security Council and other United Nations bodies.

V. Conclusion

41. As the Department charged, inter alia, with supporting the primary purpose of the Organization — the maintenance of international peace and security — the Department of Political Affairs has been given complex and difficult mandates to fulfil. OIOS commends the Department for its achievements in the past year of establishing a mediation support unit, engaging a senior adviser on mediation and launching the Peacemaker database, a comprehensive knowledge management tool for preventive diplomacy. Despite the complexity and difficulty of its tasks, the Department is effectively fulfilling many of its core functions, and many of its clients are largely satisfied with the services and the output it provides. The mixed performance and shortcomings in the critical areas of support to peacemaking and peacebuilding must be addressed as a matter of priority. Executive management has an important role to play in this regard, but could do more to facilitate the work of the Department. While individual mandates of subprogrammes and special political missions are clear and relevant, the complex environment in which the Department operates creates important challenges that must be overcome to maximize performance. Additional challenges to the effective functioning of the Department include the difficulty in achieving a single unified vision among its different divisions and units, and the lack of organized and systematic knowledge-management systems and operational guidelines. With regard to the Department's resources, targeted increases are not the only solution; what is also needed is more efficient utilization of existing resources. OIOS notes that the arrival of a new Under-Secretary-General and other recent leadership changes in the Department offer an opportunity for further enhancements to strengthen the Department of Political Affairs and achieve greater impact.

VI. Completion of the political affairs evaluation

42. In order to fulfil its mandate to conduct an in-depth evaluation of political affairs, OIOS plans to conduct an evaluation of the third group of special political missions that have not yet been the subject of evaluation (see footnote 3). The group includes 10 entities consisting of field missions located in various countries with a mandate in peacebuilding and other political areas. OIOS intends to submit a report on the third group of special political missions to the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its forty-eighth session in 2008.

VII. Recommendations

43. On the basis of the findings of the present cross-cutting assessment of the Department of Political Affairs, OIOS makes the recommendations as set out below. *The Department states that findings on the regional divisions were made available to the Controller's office, but were not sufficient to provide for additional budget allocations for the period 2008/09. Without additional resources, the Department will be hard-pressed to implement a thorough strategic review, or implement the large number of innovative initiatives suggested in the report, such as the implementation of a monitoring and evaluation framework, a client feedback mechanism, a knowledge-management framework, or reviews of work processes.* OIOS recognizes that resources will be requested in the context of the 2010-2011

budget cycle, which will start in the third quarter of 2008, but believes that steps can be taken before then to initiate implementation of these recommendations.

Recommendation 1

44. **Taking into account the findings highlighted in recent OIOS evaluations and audits, the Department should conduct a strategic planning exercise in order to develop a clearer Department-wide vision and mission statement.** OIOS commends the work undertaken by the former Under-Secretary-General in identifying Department focus areas (see para. 40 above). The mission statement should articulate a cohesive set of shared objectives and norms. All divisions and units and staff levels in the Department should be involved in this exercise. It should include an assessment of possible structural changes to achieve the Department's mission, including the possible division of responsibilities for conflict-related work and Secretary-General support.

Recommendation 2

45. **The Department should develop a Department-wide knowledge-management strategy and system for more effectively capturing, storing, sharing and integrating knowledge across divisions and units and executive management.** The strategy and system should build upon individual knowledge-management initiatives being undertaken at the division and unit level. It should include a mapping of knowledge needs and sources across the Department, the development of tools and systems to capture existing knowledge and share it with those who need it, and mechanisms for integrating knowledge into staff's day-to-day work. OIOS suggests that the Policy Planning Unit take the lead on this initiative.

Recommendation 3

46. **To ensure more efficient use of existing resources, the Department should develop a plan that outlines options for staff mobility within the Department and task reallocation between divisions and units, wherever the need is greatest.** This could include ad hoc staff rotation between divisions and units on a temporary and/or cyclical basis, as well as cross-division work teams. *The Department believes that better use of staff as a resource would be one way of addressing more efficient use of existing resources, but addressing the imbalance of the travel budget, for example, can be resolved only through resource increase.*

Recommendation 4

47. **The Department should consider recasting the roles of senior leaders in the Department so that Department management and administrative responsibilities are clearly delegated to one or more key individuals with primary responsibility and accountability for day-to-day operations of the Department.**

Recommendation 5

48. **The Department should establish a framework for obtaining client feedback that is regular and systematic.** The framework would include guidelines and instruments for collecting client feedback data, as well as systems for storing and using the data obtained to improve work performance. It would be adapted at the division or unit level as appropriate.

Recommendation 6

49. **The Department should develop a formal Department-wide monitoring and evaluation system.** The system should feature mechanisms and tools for regular internal assessment of the Department's performance.

Recommendation 7

50. **The executive management of the Department should undertake a needs assessment to determine the expectations and support requirements of the Department's substantive offices and units.** On the basis of the assessment, executive management offices should develop clear guidelines and policies for better supporting the Department, spelling out respective roles and responsibilities and outlining communication and coordination processes. They should be clearly communicated to all staff members. This exercise should be undertaken in coordination with individual division and unit change-management exercises. It should also specifically address ways in which to strengthen the Executive Office.

Recommendation 8

51. **The Department should address the current gender imbalance among senior staff in the Department.** This might include an internal leadership-development programme that identifies and trains female staff members for high-level positions in the Department.

Recommendation 9

52. **The Department leadership should ensure that the recommendations made in individual OIOS subprogramme and special political mission evaluations are appropriately followed up and implemented in a coordinated and strategic manner.**

Recommendations to individual Department divisions and units

53. OIOS also makes 40 recommendations to Department divisions and units and special political missions. The 10 regional division recommendations were endorsed by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its forty-sixth session in 2006. The remaining 30 recommendations are made in the individual subprogramme evaluation reports, which are being submitted to the Committee as addenda to the

present report. OIOS requests that the Committee consider and endorse those recommendations in its deliberations of the individual Department subprogramme evaluation reports.

(*Signed*) Inga-Britt **Ahlenius**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services

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Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the in-depth evaluation of political affairs: electoral assistance

Summary

At its forty-fourth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination requested the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to undertake an in-depth evaluation of political affairs. The first report on subprogramme 1, on prevention, control and resolution of conflicts, was presented to the Committee at its forty-sixth session. The present evaluation is part of phase two of the in-depth evaluation and covers subprogramme 2, on electoral assistance. It focuses on the structure, activities and achievements of the Electoral Assistance Division, which is responsible for implementing subprogramme 2.

While requests for United Nations electoral assistance have fluctuated since 1989, a general upward trend in their number has been observed, and the Division has been able to meet a majority of those requests. By doing so, it plays a positive and important role as a facilitator in the development of democratic practices. The Division's mandate is considered both clear and relevant by its staff members and partners. However, interpretations of how to carry out the mandate differ, owing to a lack of clear and formal guidelines for the Division's work. In addition, current systems to capture and share the Division's institutional memory are inadequate, as only partial steps have been taken to address this component of its mandate.

The Division's United Nations and non-United Nations partnerships for electoral assistance are strong, and both types of partners have expressed satisfaction with the quality of its work. However, increased coordination, communication and regular interaction with these partners could further benefit the provision of electoral assistance to Member States.

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Internally, the Division needs strengthening in several areas. It draws from the roster of experts on electoral assistance, which is a reservoir of knowledge and capacity. However, current technological and administrative constraints hinder its more effective use. The Trust Fund for Electoral Observation does not meet the Division's current needs. Furthermore, while steps are being taken to strengthen the Division's internal structure and organizational culture, enhancements of internal work processes are needed to further improve performance.

OIOS makes six recommendations to the Division and the Department of Political Affairs:

- To formulate clear and precise guidelines for all work processes
- To develop a knowledge-management system to serve as a platform for the systematic collection of institutional memory on electoral assistance
- To further strengthen coordination with its United Nations partners
- To select an electronic format for converting the roster of experts and for facilitating partners' access to such information
- To develop a long-range strategic plan that takes into account emerging demands for electoral assistance worldwide
- To initiate steps to review the guidelines for the Trust Fund for Electoral Observation, so that they are better suited to the Division's current needs.

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1–3	4
II.	Methodology	4–5	4
III.	Background	6–7	5
IV.	Evaluation findings	8–52	5
	A. While requests for United Nations electoral assistance have fluctuated since 1989, a general upward trend can be observed, and the Electoral Assistance Division has been able to meet a majority of those requests	8–10	5
	B. The Electoral Assistance Division plays a positive role as facilitator in the development of democratic practices	11–13	7
	C. The Division's mandate is both clear and relevant, but interpretations about how to fulfil the mandate differ owing to a lack of clear and formal guidelines for the Division's work	14	8
	D. Systems to capture institutional memory are inadequate, and only partial steps have been taken to address this component of the Division's mandate	15–18	8
	E. Division partnerships are strong, but increased coordination and communication could further benefit the delivery of electoral assistance	19–38	9
	F. The roster of electoral assistance experts is a reservoir of talent from which the Division draws, but administrative and technological constraints hinder its more effective use	39–45	15
	G. While steps are being taken to strengthen the Division's internal structure and organizational culture, enhancements of internal work processes are needed to further improve performance	46–50	17
	H. The Trust Fund for Electoral Observation does not meet the Division's current needs	51–52	18
V.	Conclusion	53–54	18
VI.	Recommendations	55–63	19

I. Introduction

1. At its forty-fourth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination requested the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to undertake an in-depth evaluation of political affairs.[1] The political affairs programme is implemented by the Department of Political Affairs. It is divided into the following subprogrammes:

- Subprogramme 1, on the prevention, control and resolution of conflict, implemented by four regional divisions (Africa I, Africa II, Americas and Europe, Asia and the Pacific)
- Subprogramme 2, on electoral assistance, implemented by the Electoral Assistance Division
- Subprogramme 3, on Security Council affairs, implemented by the Security Council Affairs Division
- Subprogramme 4, on decolonization, implemented by the Decolonization Unit
- Subprogramme 5, on the question of Palestine, implemented by the Division for Palestinian Rights

2. OIOS submitted a report on subprogramme 1 to the Committee at its forty-sixth session in 2006. OIOS is submitting reports on the remaining four subprogrammes, a summary report and a report on special political missions administered and supported by the Department of Political Affairs to the Committee at its forty-seventh session in 2007. The present report covers subprogramme 2, on electoral assistance.

3. The purpose of the present in-depth evaluation is to determine the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the Department of Political Affairs in relation to its objectives under subprogramme 2. It focuses on the structure, activities and achievements of the Electoral Assistance Division, which is responsible for implementing the subprogramme.

II. Methodology

4. In conducting its evaluation, OIOS utilized a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods, including self-administered surveys, online surveys, in-depth interviews in person and/or by telephone, programme data analyses and literature review. The evaluation findings are based on the following data sources: a self-administered survey of Electoral Assistance Division staff members;[2] an online survey of a non-random sample of United Nations and non-United Nations partners;[3] an online survey of a random sample of electoral experts;[4] 16 interviews with Electoral Assistance Division staff members; 16 interviews with United Nations

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/59/16), para. 382, and General Assembly resolution 59/275, para. 22.

[2] The survey was conducted in November and December 2006. Of 17 staff members, 14 responded, for an 82 per cent response rate. This source will be referred to as the "staff survey".

[3] The survey was conducted in December 2006. Of 29 partners, 11 responded, for a 38 per cent response rate. This source will be referred to as the "partner survey".

[4] The survey was conducted in December 2006. A total of 27 of 38 experts responded, but only 11 completed the survey, for a 26 per cent response rate. This source will be referred to as the "expert survey".

partners; 6 interviews with non-United Nations partners; 3 interviews with electoral assistance experts; 11 interviews with electoral authorities or proxy;[5] 2 case-study analyses of Liberia and Nigeria;[6] and a desk review of relevant literature.

5. The evaluation has several limitations. Some electoral authorities interviewed were unable to distinguish between the Electoral Assistance Division and other United Nations partners, just seeing one United Nations.[7] This contributed to the problem of attributing impact resulting from electoral assistance provided by the United Nations to the Division's specific activities. Also, response rates to the surveys of United Nations and non-United Nations partners were low. Factors that may have influenced low response rates include survey fatigue, time limitations and the transitory nature of electoral assistance work.

III. Background

6. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/137, in 1992 the Secretary-General appointed the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs as the focal point for all electoral assistance activities. The Division's role is to support the focal point to carry out his functions, while its overall objective is to render electoral assistance to Member States at their request and in accordance with the relevant decisions of the Security Council and the Assembly, through the provision of the technical and advisory support necessary for holding periodic and fair elections.

7. The Division has 16 posts; one D-2, one D-1, three P-5, four P-4, two P-3, one P-2 and four General Service staff members.[8] The Director of the Division reports directly to the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Political Affairs, who is the United Nations focal point for electoral assistance activities. In July 2006, a new Director came to the Division and initiated an internal assessment process, from which a proposal for team restructuring was made in December 2006.

IV. Evaluation findings

A. While requests for United Nations electoral assistance have fluctuated since 1989, a general upward trend can be observed, and the Electoral Assistance Division has been able to meet a majority of those requests

8. From 1989 to 2006, a total of 391 requests for electoral assistance from 106 Member States were submitted to the Electoral Assistance Division for consideration.

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[5] There were three interviews conducted that may be considered proxy. Interviews were conducted with United Nations Development Programme or Department of Peacekeeping Operations partners to describe the electoral assistance provided by the Electoral Assistance Division.

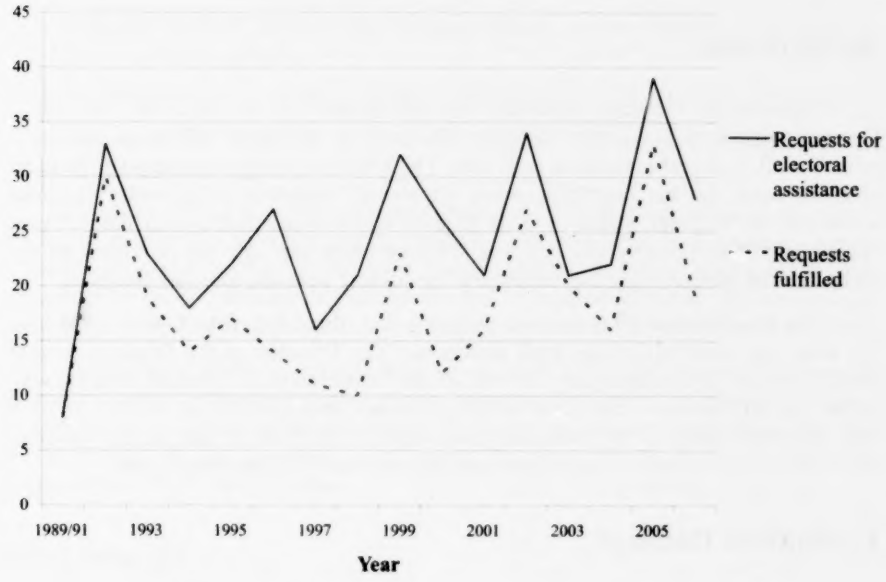
[6] The case-study analysis was conducted in partnership with the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service of New York University.

[7] However, electoral authorities in Latin America who cooperated with the United Nations Development Programme and the Electoral Assistance Division actually knew what the Division was.

[8] The information about posts comes from the Division's approved budget for 2006-2007. There is a discrepancy between the total number of posts in the Division and the number of staff surveyed or interviewed, owing to one P-3 vacancy being filled during the data-collection process.

In that time, a general increase can be noted: from 8 requests in 1989 to 28 requests in 2006. Of the 391 requests, the Division provided assistance to 289 (74 per cent of all requests). The figure illustrates fluctuations in electoral requests since 1989, owing to several countries holding their first democratic elections in 1992 (mostly in Africa) and 1999 (mostly in Asia), a marked increase in requests for technical assistance (see A/54/491), and a growth in intra-State conflicts prompting a need to support post-conflict elections in 2002 and 2005. OIOS notes that the Division has a constant workload throughout the year; when election demands are high, its workload increases even further.

Number of requests for electoral assistance and requests fulfilled (1989-2006)



9. The table shows the number of countries that requested electoral assistance from 1989 to 2006 and the number of countries in which the Division provided assistance, including those under consideration.[9] By region, Africa ranks highest in both the number of requests and the assistance provided, followed by Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. For the 2007 electoral calendar, roughly 30 per cent of the Division's global ongoing operations are in countries that have large Department of Peacekeeping Operations missions.[10]

[9] The reporting period covers 1989 to 2006, including three requests currently being considered. Of the 106, 102 are Member States and 4 are non-member States. Some States requested and/or received assistance more than once. The table is based on Division records.

[10] Figure based on Division records.

Number of countries, by region, that requested and received assistance from the Electoral Assistance Division (1989-2006)

Region	*Number of countries requesting assistance*	*Number of countries assisted by the Electoral Assistance Division*
Africa	48	47
Latin America and Caribbean	20	19
Asia	20	19
Eastern Europe	14	11
Western Europe	2	2
Other	2	1
Total	**106**	**99**

10. The operating context, determined by factors such as security, internal politics, political party integrity, historical legacy of transparency and literacy rates, greatly influences the extent to which effective electoral assistance can be delivered. The administrative capacity of autonomous electoral authorities also affects the successful holding of elections; capacity depends on the existing infrastructure in a country, logistical capacity (including use of information technology) and experience enforcing laws to promote credibility, converting political will into committed financial support, and working with and guiding media outlets. In spite of such factors, reports from electoral authorities suggest that a strengthened capacity to execute electoral operations and an enhanced commitment to the democratization process have developed over recent years.

B. The Electoral Assistance Division plays a positive role as facilitator in the development of democratic practices

11. OIOS notes that electoral stakeholders are generally satisfied with the quality of electoral assistance provided by the United Nations. United Nations and non-United Nations partners and electoral experts also agree that the Electoral Assistance Division carries out its mandate effectively. Notably, the Division's partners perceive that it is well-placed within the Department of Political Affairs to provide such support. Partner interviews also reveal that the electoral assistance provided by the Division is comprehensive, legitimate and independent, and in cases where it facilitates electoral assistance in post-conflict contexts, the Division plays an instrumental role, as the electoral authorities are unable to organize and carry out elections by themselves. However, a few partners note that additional resources are needed, particularly in the early stages of conducting elections.

12. Electoral authorities interviewed in Africa, Asia and the Middle East describe a range of assistance received from the Division, from carrying out the elections with electoral authorities to providing technical assistance in multiple areas, including facilitating observation. Depending upon the extent of their exposure to electoral assistance, the functioning of electoral authorities varies, ranging from ad hoc to more institutional or even independent. Electoral authorities interviewed were normally positive and hopeful when reflecting on future elections in their countries.

13. In Latin America, electoral authorities describe the nature of the Division's assistance as targeted at enhancing transparency, strengthening civic education and promoting participation of citizens. Interviews with these authorities reveal that assistance by the Division helps promote transparency and create in-country capacity. Though electoral authorities report high levels of satisfaction with the Division's expertise in electoral assistance, they point out the need for it to adapt to the changing priorities and challenges inherent in contemporary electoral processes. For example, countries that have acquired the capacity to organize and carry out elections currently require other types of assistance, such as the introduction of electronic voting, the refinement of legal electoral systems and the further promotion of transparency. OIOS recognizes that the Division is currently addressing such issues in its restructuring, paying closer attention to emerging and newly relevant electoral matters.

C. The Division's mandate is both clear and relevant, but interpretations about how to fulfil the mandate differ owing to a lack of clear and formal guidelines for the Division's work

14. Staff perceptions about mandate relevance are positive, as all staff rate it as good or excellent; equally, 90 per cent of partners rate mandate relevance as excellent or good. The majority of staff also rate mandate clarity as good or excellent, although a few rate it as fair. In staff interviews, it became clear that there are variable interpretations about how the mandate should be carried out. Some staff members expressed concern at the lack of a unified strategy in the Division to carry out electoral assistance; they indicated that the decision to provide electoral assistance is not guided by a formal policy, criteria or long-term strategy. Once the decision to provide electoral assistance has been taken, there is also no framework to determine the type of assistance that can be provided. Similarly, partner survey respondents note that the priorities for the Division when responding to requests for electoral assistance are not detailed or are unclear. Partner interviews also emphasize that there are no guidelines to direct the Division's work.

D. Systems to capture institutional memory are inadequate, and only partial steps have been taken to address this component of the Division's mandate

15. In its resolution 46/137 (para. 9), the General Assembly declared that the mandate of the Electoral Assistance Division was "to build on experience gained and to develop an institutional memory" on electoral assistance. In 2000, training materials, including a CD-ROM, were developed for international observers and United Nations staff. In 2003, the Division, the Carter Center and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, initiated the formulation of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and the Code of Conduct for International Election Observers, both of which were endorsed by numerous countries and international organizations from 2005 to 2006. In 2004, the Division and the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women co-produced a handbook entitled *Women and elections: guide to promoting the participation of women in elections*. These products are substantive and relevant, but, with the exception of the Code of Conduct, they do not

sufficiently constitute a systematic, institutionalized effort for collecting and disseminating electoral knowledge. Also, the Division does not have information on how useful those products and contributions have been to users.

16. Internally, Division staff acknowledge that the lack of a system to capture institutional memory is a shortcoming; a formal system to collect, share and disseminate experiences in electoral assistance is missing. Staff express dissatisfaction with the level of effectiveness in carrying out the following activities:

(a) collecting institutional electoral knowledge;

(b) categorizing and analysing institutional knowledge so as to ensure ease of access, assimilation of lessons learned and experiences and continual review of policy trends;

(c) sharing and disseminating institutional knowledge through technical papers, guidelines, manuals, training and seminars;

(d) promoting the sharing of knowledge and information between the United Nations and non-United Nations partners.[11]

Similarly, most staff stated that there was a need to review this core function. OIOS notes that the keenness of Division staff to review the function is currently reflected in the Division's current restructuring process (see para. 46 below).

17. Partner interviews emphasize that, given its global perspective, the Division plays a unique role in electoral assistance. Partner surveys and interviews also indicate that more documents could be produced for both United Nations and non-United Nations partners. They suggest that the Division develop documents on the history of electoral practices, lessons learned from different regions and major priorities to be considered when developing electoral programmes. They also mention that only the United Nations can develop guidance and subsequent standards against which to assess whether an election is credible and legitimate. Reference materials covering variations of how standards can be interpreted and what is considered legitimate are also requested, as are reflections on different electoral processes.

18. OIOS notes that regular and systematic data-collection systems could also be designed to examine several relevant areas, including to what extent Member States are satisfied with the Division's specific assistance, consultant views on what influences effective electoral processes, the usefulness and utility of standards and codes and the nature of the cooperation with United Nations and non-United Nations partners. OIOS believes that such information would enhance the Division's work.

E. Division partnerships are strong, but increased coordination and communication could further benefit the delivery of electoral assistance

19. Partnerships are an integral part of the Division's work. Its current partners include other divisions within the Department of Political Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the

[11] On average, 93 per cent of staff rankings for these activities fall within the "fair", "poor", or "very poor" categories.

Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) and the European Union. They also include partnerships with national and international non-governmental organizations, such as the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, the Carter Center, the International Foundation for Election Systems and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Partnership with the Department of Political Affairs

20. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/137, in which the Assembly endorsed the view that a senior official in the offices of the Secretary-General should be designated to act as a focal point for electoral activities, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs has been designated the focal point for all electoral assistance activities at the United Nations. One of the most important aspects of the Division's mandate is to advise the focal point on the possibility of providing electoral assistance. In providing that advice, some staff note that the Division should consider political analyses and advice from the other divisions within the Department of Political Affairs. Interviews suggest that analyses conducted in consultation with the other parts of the Department of Political Affairs are now more comprehensive. That contrasts with past years, in which the tendency in the Division was to provide advice to the focal point without consulting partners, and the Division had, in general, little contact with the other divisions in the Department.

21. OIOS observes that the Division's new management is promoting enhanced internal partnerships within the Department of Political Affairs. Partner and staff interviews reveal that informed decisions sent to the focal point are now shared and discussed with relevant regional divisions within the Department, and that Division desk officers are encouraged to ask for contributions and discuss their information and decisions with relevant Department colleagues. As a result, Division desk officers regularly consult with their regional division colleagues to produce notes, obtain information on a political situation, or decide on a course of action. Staff interviews indicate that when there is no such interaction, it is most often due to the fact that the exchange might take some time, thus delaying the provision of electoral assistance. OIOS believes that the continuation of this overall improvement in the levels of internal Department communication and exchange is necessary.

Partnerships with the United Nations Development Programme and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations

22. When providing in-country electoral assistance, the Division's two major partners are UNDP and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. The Division does not have the capacity to implement electoral assistance in the field, and for this reason these partnerships are of crucial importance. The Division partners with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations when a request for electoral assistance is made for a country in which a peacekeeping mission exists. The Division partners with UNDP when there is no peacekeeping component in the country to which assistance is going to be provided. In some cases, UNDP may also join the Division's partnership with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations for the provision of electoral assistance to a country with a peacekeeping mission. In all cases, but especially for the latter, partner surveys and interviews highlight that

coordination among all parties is crucial for the successful delivery of electoral assistance.

23. In both types of partnerships, the Division is responsible for conducting a needs assessment mission, a primary method for considering formal government requests for electoral assistance. The mission, consisting of a team of Division staff members, experts, other Department of Political Affairs stakeholders and other United Nations partners, assesses the electoral and political environment and the viability of the request. The mission may last up to 10 working days, after which a report is issued recommending whether assistance should be provided and, if so, the nature of the assistance warranted. Based on the report, the focal point for electoral assistance makes an informed decision on whether the assistance will be provided.

24. After the decision to provide assistance has been taken, Division and UNDP offices (both at Headquarters and at the country level) hold consultations to agree on the core principles of the assistance to be provided and jointly create an electoral assistance project document. Partner interviews highlight the importance of strong coordination at this stage to successfully implement the project. UNDP plays a crucial role in assisting project funding and takes the lead in project implementation. While the project is ongoing, the Division provides substantive advice as needed. OIOS recognizes that there is a note of guidance that stipulates the roles and responsibilities of the two agencies in the process (A/56/344, annex II).

25. UNDP partners characterize the relationship with the Division as good. Examples of important support provided by the Division to UNDP country offices include expert advice on electoral matters, relevant analysis and documentation on electoral projects and processes, as well as timely and appropriate mediation in delicate situations, such as in conflicts between contending parties or resistance to the participation of electoral observers.

26. Partner interviews and staff surveys and interviews reveal that the Division and UNDP have different perspectives about the provision of electoral assistance. UNDP and Division stakeholders mention that UNDP is a close partner of the Government and, as such, may not be as objective as the Division. Similarly, the stakeholders perceive the Division as being more concerned with maintaining electoral assistance standards, ensuring the impartiality of the United Nations and following credible electoral conduct. All such factors are considered indispensable to the effective delivery of electoral assistance. While UNDP respondents value the Division's role highly, such appreciation is contingent upon fluid dialogue leading to a common approach in providing the electoral assistance under review. Furthermore, the establishment of time frames to shorten the amount of time necessary to obtain the focal point's approval for an election project is viewed as an important step towards more effective collaboration between the two organizations.

27. OIOS notes that the partnership between the Division and UNDP could be further strengthened. Until recently, the two organizations often conducted their assessment missions separately; the Division did not typically involve UNDP country offices in either the needs assessment mission or the analysis contributing to the decision to provide electoral assistance. In the past, it was common for some offices to not receive the Division's assessment report. Partner and staff interviews describe the lack of a substantive consultative process between the two organizations, which sometimes leads to disagreements on the nature of electoral

assistance activities within a project. On its part, UNDP also failed to involve the Division in several important election-related projects.

28. OIOS recognizes that steps have recently been taken to improve coordination between the Division and UNDP, but that those steps need to be institutionalized. Even though there is a note of guidance on electoral assistance for the Division and UNDP, their staff indicate that the guide is not used regularly. Nevertheless, positive steps taken include more joint missions and the sharing of needs assessment mission reports and focal-point decisions. On the part of UNDP, current efforts to improve coordination and communication include the involvement of the Division in the preparation of an implementation guide on electoral assistance. UNDP also expressed interest in working in partnership in the areas of defining electoral standards and evaluating elections.

29. The Division works in partnership with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in countries that have a peacekeeping mission in place. In those cases, the Department plays a political, logistical and administrative role, while the Division has the substantive lead. It has the responsibility of conducting the needs assessment mission to inform the focal point's decision on whether to provide electoral assistance. Partners say that the Division, in coordination with desk officers of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the electoral unit in the mission, provides expert advice and substantive support to the electoral unit in the mission, communicating and working closely; coordinates the recruitment of personnel who form the electoral component of the mission through the Division roster of experts; and provides input to the budget of the electoral component of the mission, on the basis of the mandate given by the Security Council to the mission.

30. The relationship between the Division and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is described by Department respondents as very good, and stakeholders emphasize the Division's professionalism in organizing elections. According to Department interviews, the strong partnership has resulted in good staffing of the missions; the achievement of difficult milestones in the electoral process, such as the registration of large numbers of people for elections in difficult circumstances; the provision of appropriate training; and deployment of a large number of polling stations in countries lacking infrastructure.

31. OIOS observes that the Department's recruitment process affects the Division's effectiveness in conducting its work, as some Division staff members consider it long and cumbersome. The Division needs to deploy electoral experts on very short notice; however, the Department's administrative procedures take, on average, two months from the time the request from the mission is received to the placement of the expert. OIOS notes that the length of the recruitment process is dictated by the rules and regulations of the United Nations and is not due to the inactivity of the Department. In addition, some Division stakeholders mention that problems have arisen during the Department's administrative dealings and follow-up to the hiring processes.

32. In addition to addressing these administrative issues, better coordination between the Department and the Division would help increase efficiency in the delivery of electoral assistance. Department and Division staff members themselves and case study analysis suggest that effectiveness would increase through (a) the creation of a clear coordination framework and reporting lines in cases where the Division is working with the Department and the UNDP country office is also

involved; (b) a clear delimitation of responsibilities among the parties offering assistance; and (c) greater coordination between the Division and the Best Practices Section of the Department in the identification of best practices in electoral assistance. In its report on the management audit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations — substantive operations (AP2005/600/16), OIOS recommended a policy framework for cooperation, and the clear division of labour and costs, as well as procedures for resolving any conflicts in the area of electoral assistance projects on an urgent basis. In response to that recommendation, the Division plans to work with the Department to develop a policy framework.

Partnership with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

33. In its report on the in-depth evaluation of the electoral assistance programme, OIOS describes a stronger working relationship between the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Division than currently exists (E/AC.51/1999/3, para. 13). The Department used to play a stronger support role for the Division. The lack of a current partnership may be due to the fact that the Department used to focus considerably more on technical cooperation activities, and some of the roles in the area of technical cooperation that it used to play are now taken by UNDP and the United Nations Office for Project Services. Recently, contacts have been made again between the Division and the Department, and attempts to collaborate in common electoral projects are under way. The Department is interested in working on very specific issues, such as the prevention of pre- and post-electoral violence, an area in which it is currently conducting research. However, OIOS notes that, given the current re-orientation of Department priorities, the scope of cooperation between the two bodies is limited.

Partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

34. Cooperation between the Division and OHCHR is limited. The two entities collaborated in the preparation of the needs assessment mission and a subsequent report for the provision of electoral assistance in Sierra Leone, an experience described by both parties as good. However, OIOS could not identify other examples of collaboration between the Division and OHCHR, even though OHCHR partners emphasize the usefulness of incorporating a human rights perspective in the Division's electoral work. This practice could help to identify issues that might hinder people's participation in the elections, provide advice on whether the courts are in a position to play the role of impartial judges on electoral disputes, and provide informed advice on whether the rights of freedom of expression of movement are respected. Such substantive areas can be identified and brought into needs assessment missions and electoral assistance processes.

Partnership with the United Nations Volunteers

35. The Division also works with UNV. Volunteers are used as resources for missions led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to organize and carry out elections, particularly in post-conflict countries. Partner interviews indicate that this collaboration is strong, as each organization has a clear understanding of the other's role.

Non-United Nations partnerships

36. The Division also works in collaboration with non-United Nations partners. Among the regional organizations, the European Union has strengthened its own work in the area of electoral assistance, in the context of a general strategy aimed at promoting the rule of law and democratic freedoms. The European Union implements its own electoral assistance and cooperation projects in close partnership with UNDP. The Division's working relationship with the European Union is, in this sense, an indirect one, since it is mainly conducted through UNDP. As a consequence, a good working relationship between the Division and UNDP contributes to the effectiveness with which the European Union can conduct its own projects.

37. The Division also works in partnership with national and international non-governmental organizations. The international organizations with which the Division most frequently interacts are the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, the Carter Center, the International Foundation for Election Systems and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. When working together, stakeholders of both the Division and the organization note that the partnership is effective. Division staff highly value the electoral assistance expertise of the organizations, their willingness to cooperate, and their greater flexibility in recruiting valuable experts. Similarly, non-governmental organization stakeholders express their gratitude for the Division's assistance and describe its role in promoting and facilitating the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation as crucial. In interviews, the partners state that the symbolic endorsement of the Declaration by the United Nations through the participation of the Secretary-General, and the intergovernmental legitimacy that the Division has in the electoral field, are both essential. Some partners note that the Declaration has created a consensus among very different stakeholders.

38. Non-governmental organization stakeholders also highlight the Division's capacity to bring together major political donors and other stakeholders when providing electoral assistance at the country level. The Division's level of technical support is described as high quality. Furthermore, these organizations believe that the Division plays a crucial role by offering its good offices and advice and empowering other organizations in the process. Examples mentioned in some interviews with non-governmental organization respondents and the case-study analyses include the Division's good offices in facilitating interactions between international non-governmental organizations and the national electoral commission, which was critical to the success of the organizations' activities in providing electoral assistance. Another organization describes how the Division had identified a number of problems in the electoral process of a particular country and addressed those issues with the electoral authorities, ultimately preventing possible accusations of fraud in the elections. The Division also played a useful mediating role in convincing a Government to allow observers in its electoral process and helping ease tensions. Finally, the Division collaborated successfully with international non-governmental organizations by providing them with information about the electoral process and helping them to understand the particular context in which elections are held. The organizations interviewed say that all such activities helped them to perform effectively.

F. The roster of electoral assistance experts is a reservoir of talent from which the Division draws, but administrative and technological constraints hinder its more effective use

39. The Division maintains a roster of 1,200 international experts on electoral issues. Staff interviews indicate that the Division uses the roster systematically to (a) staff needs assessment missions with experts on specific electoral issues for which the Division has no specified knowledge; (b) provide the Department of Peacekeeping Operations with a list of candidates to staff electoral units of peacekeeping missions; and (c) propose names of experts to UNDP for its electoral assistance projects. The Division also clears United Nations Volunteers for peacekeeping missions. Assignments for experts may therefore vary from conducting needs assessment missions to providing expert advice on the organization of elections. Deployment may last anywhere from one week to several months. Expert survey data show that the experts are international, have extensive experience, are predominantly male and have graduate-level degrees. According to Division records, 70 per cent of all experts are male and come from the following regions: Africa (15 per cent), Asia and the Pacific (13.2 per cent), Middle East (2.4 per cent), Europe (37.1 per cent), Latin America and the Caribbean (9.8 per cent) and North America (22.4 per cent).

40. While certain established procedures and practices guide expert-selection processes, OIOS observes three constraints that prevent the effective use of roster experts. First, the urgent and transitory nature of electoral work makes organizing and deploying large teams for missions led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations challenging and shortens the timespan between offering a consultancy and the date when the expert is supposed to travel. Second, the current personnel and administrative systems of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations are not flexible enough to deploy experts on short notice. As mentioned above in paragraph 31, OIOS notes that the length of the recruitment process is dictated by the rules and regulations of the United Nations. Third, often the best response to the need of a Member State is to deploy an expert on a consultancy for a short period. Experts are therefore hired on special service assignment contracts which, under current rules, preclude them from working with the Secretariat for six months after their contract has lapsed.[12] As a result, the Division experiences difficulties when staffing short-term assignments, because if experts accept an assignment under a special service assignment contract, they are precluded from working in missions run by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations for at least six months, which may prevent them from applying for work with the Division.

41. The majority of expert survey respondents rate the Division positively; it is seen as providing clear and comprehensive terms for assignments and sufficient briefing about the nature of the electoral and political context prior to departure. Experts also describe the working culture on teams as inclusive and participatory, mentioning also that they respect how national partners are featured as prominent stakeholders.

[12] See ST/AI/2006/3, para. 5.6 (b). The Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations interpret the rule differently, as it does not specify whether missions led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations are included.

42. Within the Division, two staff members are primarily responsible for entering and organizing expert data and carrying out the selection process. There is general consensus that two staff members are insufficient for this work.[13] Staff and partners state that, in order to maintain the Division's roster and facilitate access of United Nations partners to it, additional support is warranted.

43. The roster is intended to fulfil the needs of electoral experts in both UNDP and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, a requirement that poses a challenge when selecting an electronic database system accessible to all organizations and that integrates with each organization's different recruitment procedures. OIOS recognizes that the Division is currently in the process of addressing this concern. As noted in the OIOS report on the management audit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations — substantive operations (AP2005/560/05), to date the system encapsulating all roster-related data on consultants has not been converted into electronic format. The report recommended that as soon as funds became available, the Division should implement the project of transforming the manually managed roster of experts into a web-based roster on an urgent basis. In response to that recommendation, the Division has proposed to contract a consultant systems analyst to assess and recommend appropriate solutions for the development and migration to an online roster system.

44. The Division's practice of using the same experts repeatedly, particularly for matters relating to the delivery of electoral assistance and cooperation in larger Department of Peacekeeping Operations missions, has an unintended positive effect. Experts become seasoned and well-suited for the ever-changing challenges of delivering electoral assistance. Teams, which are often composed of the same individuals, become accustomed to working together, a practice that strengthens the delivery of electoral assistance by building on past experiences from other contexts and countries. Partners and staff indicate that such a practice helps experts to develop and sustain a strong competitive edge, as noted by electoral authorities, who highly praised consultant competencies as well as the quality of the electoral assistance. However, OIOS notes that this practice does not adequately ensure that the United Nations consistently has access to, and builds, a wider pool of potentially qualified candidates.

45. OIOS notes that the knowledge gained from the above-mentioned teams is not captured systematically. Experts suggest that knowledge could be better captured and institutionalized by requiring a review of the appropriateness and sustainability of certain electoral assistance modalities. Furthermore, OIOS notes that the Division should regularly conduct evaluations of the work of the teams in order to capture lessons learned. Lastly, though there is a deliberate effort to cultivate consultants to deliver effective electoral assistance, OIOS observes that there is no platform by which they can voice their concerns.

[13] OIOS is not able to verify this assertion.

G. While steps are being taken to strengthen the Division's internal structure and organizational culture, enhancements of internal work processes are needed to further improve performance

46. the Division's current structure is such that staff members work on country portfolios and are assigned a certain number of countries on which to work. As the number of requests for electoral assistance fluctuates over time, so does the number of assigned countries a desk officer handles. Despite such fluctuations, OIOS notes that the staff workload is consistently high. In response to past staff concerns about the equity of portfolio allocations, the Division is undertaking a restructuring process. As part of that process, on 21 December 2006, the Division Director presented a proposal to the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs for the creation of three teams: (a) country-support; (b) strategic partnerships and resource mobilization; and (c) policy and institutional memory. The Division has not yet formally adopted the new structure, and it is acknowledged that the proposed teams will be subject to change. However, OIOS believes that a team-based approach is reasonable and appropriate, given the nature and scope of the Division's functions.

47. The ratio of General Service staff to Professional staff (including the Director) in the Division is one to three. This is much higher than the average ratio in the Secretariat of 1.36 General Service posts to 1 Professional post proposed for the biennium 2006-2007 (A/60/6 (Introduction), para. 22). The Division is currently requesting two additional General Service staff members to address the imbalance.

48. In view of these recent changes, most staff are currently optimistic about the senior leadership within the Division. A new Director started shortly after the in-depth evaluation began in 2006. Staff interviews suggest that, under the previous leadership, the working environment was uninspiring owing to, inter alia, high workload, unpredictability of tasks, an inability to focus on tasks, and minimal direction offered about how best to approach the work when support was solicited. However, the Division's current working culture is rated highly by staff. The current leadership style emphasizes a form of collective thinking that is not only feasible, given the relative size of the Division, but also appropriate, considering that the Division's premise is to promote democracy on a global scale. Staff interviews and surveys indicate that most of the Professional staff members were consulted and solicited to participate and contribute actively, although the General Service staff members express a desire for greater involvement in strategy and policy discussions.

49. Staff interviews reveal that internal communication and interaction are positive, and most staff surveyed rate current lines of communication as excellent or good. Staff also say that they feel free to speak and ask questions without hesitation and that weekly meetings strengthen connections and contribute to staff cohesion. In the staff survey, most state that the lines of reporting are excellent and the approach used to address tasks, particularly those requiring joint decisions among colleagues, is based on interactive exchange. This approach is confirmed by staff survey results indicating that there is mutual respect for professional competencies. OIOS notes that, as a complement to clear and positive internal communication and interaction, staff motivation to perform efficiently and effectively is also strong: most staff survey respondents rate staff morale within the Division as high or very high.

50. Regarding work processes, OIOS notes that operational guidelines to carry out the Division's work are inadequate. Clearly written guidelines designed to orient

thinking at the operational level are virtually absent. For instance, in-depth interviews reveal that staff currently use an individual approach when reviewing electoral assistance requests, an approach that includes, but is not limited to, holistic views about elections in the democratization process, crisis prevention, sustainability of electoral activities and ideological consistency with the Division's larger objective. The approach is not documented in any way. The work environment inside the Division is such that staff are at liberty to take professional initiatives, and each staff member brings a different approach, drawing from his or her own knowledge. However, guidelines outlining what a staff member should consider when reviewing requests for electoral assistance are absent, which raises concerns about transparency and consistency in the Division's work processes.

H. The Trust Fund for Electoral Observation does not meet the Division's current needs

51. The Trust Fund for Electoral Observation was created in 1989 (a) to allow the Division to meet demands that are unexpected and not included in the budget for the previous biennium; (b) to cover the Division's research and development function, providing a consolidation and systematization of lessons learned, which in turn leads to the development of new approaches and pilot programmes also supported by the Trust Fund; and (c) to provide funds on an emergency basis for a first rapid response to electoral requests, in particular when UNDP and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations are unable to provide such funding (General Assembly resolution 46/137, para. 14). The Trust Fund balance has been steadily decreasing: from a balance of $2,454,161 in 2003, total reserves and funds balances at 31 December 2006 had decreased to $589,369. Division staff also express concern about the high overhead rate (15 per cent) that the United Nations applies to voluntary contributions (ST/AI/284, annex, sect. III.A, para. 1).

52. OIOS recognizes the Division's current efforts to explore fund-raising alternatives through its restructuring plan. OIOS also notes that Trust Fund resources are earmarked primarily for electoral observation activities, although the Division no longer conducts electoral observation unless specifically requested by the General Assembly or the Security Council. OIOS therefore concludes that, given its current guidelines, the Trust Fund is unsuited to the Division's current needs.

V. Conclusion

53. The Division's work in facilitating and/or providing electoral assistance is valued by Member States and other electoral stakeholders. Over the years, the demand for assistance has been steadily evolving, but the Division's commitment to helping Member States conduct elections has been unwavering. Nevertheless, systems for collecting and disseminating knowledge on electoral assistance are inadequate. More effective delivery of this part of the Division's mandate would benefit partnerships, strengthen the Division's role, and add value to current operations. Overall, the work with United Nations partners has been good, and through these partnerships, electoral assistance has been successfully provided. However, better coordination would further strengthen efficiency.

54. OIOS recognizes that the Division has experienced organizational challenges in the past, but current leadership appears to be stabilizing conditions and refocusing the Division's direction and efforts to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. These efforts are generally supported by Division staff.

VI. Recommendations

55. On the basis of the evaluation findings, OIOS makes the recommendations as set out below.

Recommendation 1

56. **The Electoral Assistance Division should formulate clear and precise guidelines to strengthen its work processes** (see finding C). Specifically, guidelines need to be developed for:

(a) Reviewing requests for electoral assistance;

(b) Assessing the type of electoral assistance to be provided;

(c) Determining how the electoral assistance should be provided.

Recommendation 2

57. **The Division should develop a knowledge-management system to serve as a platform for the systematic collection and dissemination of institutional memory on electoral assistance** (see findings D, E, and F). Such a system should serve two main purposes:

(a) It should guide Division partners' work in electoral assistance. The Division is ideally positioned to contribute to international efforts to produce and share relevant knowledge on various electoral issues. As such, OIOS suggests that the Division consider producing documents and sharing analytical documents on key electoral issues and continue discussions on the feasibility and desirability of the elaboration of election standards or principles;

(b) It should guide the Division's own work in facilitating or providing electoral assistance. Specifically, the Division should:

(i) Regularly collect and document good practices on cooperation with United Nations and non-United Nations partners;

(ii) In the specific context of electoral assistance provided in peacekeeping missions, collaborate with the Best Practices Section of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to systematically collect and disseminate lessons learned;

(iii) Regularly collect and document the knowledge of experts on the effectiveness of electoral assistance.

58. This recommendation complements the recommendation made by OIOS in 2006 in its management audit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations — substantive operations (AP2005/560/05), that the Division should develop and

update on a continuous basis its institutional memory and share the lessons learned with Member States, other stakeholders and academia in general through printed media and the Internet.

Recommendation 3

59. **The Division should strengthen coordination with its United Nations partners to further enhance information sharing and make the delivery of electoral assistance more effective** (see finding E). OIOS recommends that the Division focus on:

(a) Institutionalizing coordination with the Department of Political Affairs, UNDP, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and OHCHR through regular meetings and consultations;

(b) Ensuring clear definition and understanding of roles and responsibilities between the Division, UNDP, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and any other partners involved in the delivery of electoral assistance by creating effective coordinating structures when necessary, including the delineation of current roles and responsibilities between the Division and UNDP by building on the note of guidance;

(c) Consulting with OHCHR to include human rights issues in the context of electoral assistance (such as those described in para. 34) when developing future electoral assistance activities.

60. This recommendation complements the recommendation made by OIOS in 2006 in its report on the management audit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations — substantive operations (AP2005/600/16), that the Division and its partners develop a policy framework for cooperation with clear division of labour and costs, as well as procedures for resolving any conflicts in the area of electoral assistance projects on an urgent basis.

Recommendation 4

61. **As a follow-up to the OIOS report on the management audit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations — substantive operations (AP2005/560/05), the Division should select an electronic format for converting the roster of experts and for facilitating partner access to electoral experts** (see finding F).

Recommendation 5

62. As discussed in paragraph 13 above, as more countries are refining their electoral processes, their demands for electoral assistance are evolving. Therefore, other types of assistance supporting the challenges of emerging electoral systems will be needed. **The Division should create a long-range strategic plan to address new electoral trends and changing assistance needs of Member States.** OIOS recognizes that, as part of current efforts to restructure, one team will be assigned to create strategies that meet new and emerging electoral demands.

Recommendation 6

63. **The Division should initiate steps to review the guidelines for the Trust Fund for Electoral Observation so that they better suit the Division's current needs** (see finding H).

(*Signed*) Inga-Britt **Ahlenius**
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